MEDIA AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS

Media Coverage of Demonstrations and Journalists’ Safety in Algeria, Chile, France, Iraq and Lebanon

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The Samir Kassir Foundation is a Lebanese non-profit organization officially incorporated in Beirut under registry number 30/A.D., founded on 1 February 2006. It is named after Samir Kassir, a Lebanese journalist assassinated in Beirut on 2 June 2005. It aims to spread democratic culture in Lebanon and the Arab world, encourage new talents in journalism, and build the movement for a cultural, democratic, and secular renewal. These are the conditions to lift the Arab populations out of their “state of malaise,” described in Samir Kassir’s book “Being Arab.” The Foundation strives to defend freedom of media and culture through the SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom that it launched in 2008 and made it the largest center to monitor violations against journalists and artists in the Levant as well as a reference for research on journalism and for training media professionals and enhancing their skills.
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Findings

• Solutions journalism was not apparent in mainstream media coverage of socio-economic issues in the year prior to the outbreak of protests in Algeria, Chile, France, Lebanon and Iraq. Interviews with media practitioners indicated that there is no culture of solutions journalism in any of the countries reviewed.

• Security preparations were found to be inadequate to the risks of reporting from protests. Given the high levels of danger in Chile and Iraq, the lack of security preparation and equipment in those contexts is particularly alarming.

• Security risk experts recommend a number of measures that local news outlets can adopt to ensure they have greater security awareness and preparation when covering demonstrations. These can be found on page 16.

• Censorship was starkly apparent in Iraq and Algeria, targeting both mainstream media and social media (through deliberate internet disruptions), and to a lesser extent in Lebanon.

• Biased reporting was evident in all five countries. In Chile and France in particular, this impacted the credibility of mainstream media and most likely boosted the appeal of digital and social media.

• Digital and alternative media have been useful in circumventing censorship (Iraq) and allowing new avenues for objective journalism (Lebanon and Chile).

• Social media was central in mobilising mass movements, circumventing censorship and influencing narratives around protest movements. It has facilitated the appearance of citizen journalism platforms which have allowed freer expression and played a key role in debunking fake news and misinformation in contexts where media face restrictions.

• On the other hand, social media is also responsible for spreading false information, propagating echo chambers of information and resulting in greater harassment of journalists. Furthermore, in Algeria, Iraq and to a lesser extent Lebanon, there is evidence of fake accounts and bots influencing the narrative and carrying out online harassment. This has presented not only a threat to the truth, but also added security risks to journalists.
Table 1: Summary of findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence of:</th>
<th>Algeria</th>
<th>Chile</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Iraq</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions journalism</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberate physical attack on journalists by:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security forces</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-government non-state actors</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protesters</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive online harassment of journalists</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists injured covering protests</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists trained on physical safety</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A culture of security preparedness</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widespread use of safety equipment</td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government censorship of news</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased media</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet shut downs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online disinformation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

The mobilisation of millions of people across the globe demanding economic, political and climate reform was one of the defining stories of 2019. For journalists, it was also one of the most challenging. Covering large, fluid and often leaderless mass movements over prolonged periods of time can be problematic, particularly when they occur in highly repressive regimes where journalists are often direct targets of a security apparatus that wants to quash dissenting voices. The proliferation of social media has compounded these challenges, with misinformation and fake news gaining rapid traction, online abuse becoming widespread, and congestion in an already competitive information space.

The aim of this research is to unpack and examine the state of local media coverage of protest movements across five locations: Algeria, Chile, France, Lebanon and Iraq. The research paper will be divided into four parts: Section 1 determines the extent of ‘Solution journalism’ in local media, particularly regarding coverage of socio-economic issues prior to demonstrations breaking out. Section 2 examines the extent of media preparation ahead of planned demonstrations, from logistical, security and communications perspectives. It concludes with a set of guidelines for local news outlets covering demonstrations. Section 3 briefly examines media censorship and bias. The final component, Section 4, looks at the role played by non-traditional outlets in shaping the narrative around protest movements, particularly digital and social media, and analyses the role of social media in spreading information and disinformation.

Methodology

Research was conducted between 10 November and 16 December 2019. To ensure triangulation, 30 interviews were carried out comprising of at least five individuals with knowledge of the media sector in each country. This figure includes journalists from over two dozen news outlets, as well as press freedom professionals, activists and two individuals who provide security for major news organisations. Secondary research was carried out in Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

Research for Section 1 required establishing clear research parameters, as an in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis of articles by mainstream media outlets across five countries was beyond the scope of this project. Given time and human resource constraints, it was determined that the most effective methodology to assess cross-contextual media coverage of socio-economic issues comprised of the following process:

1. In each of the five countries, the issue the author deemed to be the most significant cause of the demonstrations based on secondary research was identified. Two to three major traditional news outlets were selected per country (see Table 2 below).

2. Words that could skew research results were identified (e.g. ‘gender’ in cases where ‘inequality’ was determined to be the root cause).
3. Searches were carried out using the following Google search formula: [site:{Full website name}] + ['root cause'] + ['-term that might skew result'] + [country] with a date range of one year ending the day prior to the outbreak of protests and in the main language of the news outlet. For example:

```
'site: www.elmercurio.com.cl' 'desigualdad' '-genero' 'Chile'
[Date Range: 14 October 2018 to 13 October 2019], language: Spanish.
```

4. Finally, each article from the first few pages of Google Results was read and qualitatively assessed against the definition of ‘solutions journalism’ (see page 9). Articles that were particularly in-depth and included original research were noted.

**Table 2: Newspapers researched for Section 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prominent newspapers researched for the section</th>
<th>Root cause</th>
<th>Filter word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>فساد (corruption)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El-Khabar, El Watan, Echorouk al-Youmi (echoroukonline)</td>
<td>فساد (corruption)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Desigualdad (inequality)</td>
<td>Genero (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Mercurio, La Tercera</td>
<td>Desigualdad (inequality)</td>
<td>Genero (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Inégalités (inequality)</td>
<td>Genre (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libération, Le Figaro, Le Monde</td>
<td>Inégalités (inequality)</td>
<td>Genre (gender)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>فساد (corruption)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mada, Al-Zaman</td>
<td>فساد (corruption)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>An-Nahar, Al-Akhbar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Context**

Table 3 below provides a snapshot of the demonstrations in each context, including insight into the causes, duration, scale and levels of violence in each context, as well as their comparative levels of press freedom. The table is ordered chronologically, from earliest to most recent outbreak of protests. Casualty and injury rates are significantly higher in Algeria, Chile and Iraq than in France and Lebanon. Table 4, on page 11, lists casualty rates and specific security issues facing journalists reporting on demonstrations in the same five countries.
### Table 3: Overview of the demonstrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (population in millions)</th>
<th>Start date</th>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Largest demonstration</th>
<th>Levels of violence</th>
<th>Freedom House ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France (67)</td>
<td>October-November 2018</td>
<td>Rising fuel prices Cost of living Inequality</td>
<td>300,000 (17 November 2018)</td>
<td>860 injuries 2 deaths</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria (41)</td>
<td>16 February 2019</td>
<td>Abdelaziz Bouteflika seeking a fifth term as president. Corruption</td>
<td>Hundreds of thousands to a million (29 March 2019)</td>
<td>4 deaths (3 heart attacks&gt;180 injuries (&gt;110 police)</td>
<td>Not free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq (38)</td>
<td>1 October 2019</td>
<td>Unemployment Inequality Cost of living</td>
<td>Tens to hundreds of thousands (1 November 2019)</td>
<td>&gt;500 deaths &gt;19,000 injured</td>
<td>Not free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile (18)</td>
<td>14 October 2019</td>
<td>Metro fare price hike Inequality Cost of living</td>
<td>&gt;1 million (25 October 2019)</td>
<td>&gt;23 deaths &gt;2,300 injuries (&gt;285 eye injuries)</td>
<td>Free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon (6)</td>
<td>17 October 2019</td>
<td>WhatsApp Tax Corruption Cost of Living</td>
<td>Hundreds of thousands to 1 million (20 October 2019)</td>
<td>1 killed Dozens-low hundreds injured</td>
<td>Partly free</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data is accurate up to 16 December 2019.


Solutions Journalism and Coverage of Socio-economic Issues

Solutions journalism is “a way of approaching reporting that emphasizes solutions to problems, rather than the problems themselves, upping an article’s relevance, clarifying its purpose and uplifting its readers. It comes from reporters approaching a story with the intention of looking at what’s being done to address it, and using that as the story’s axis.”

The concept dates to the late 1990s and is aimed at increasing the quality of journalism; however, carrying out solutions journalism effectively is harder than it sounds. The Solutions Journalism Network (SJN), a non-profit that works to make solutions journalism a mainstay in news reporting, suggests strict criteria for the term, including:

1. Focusing in-depth on a response to a problem and how the response works in meaningful detail;
2. Focusing on effectiveness, not good intentions, and presenting available evidence of results;
3. Discussing the limitations of the approach; and
4. Seeking to provide insight that others can use.

The majority of interviewees did not provide examples of solutions journalism that conforms to the SJN’s definition. Interviewees were not widely familiar with the concept. Those who claimed there was solutions journalism in their media space did not provide examples fitting the above definition. Rather, they pointed to examples of analytical articles and TV debates, where multiple viewpoints were shared. Secondary research, which looked at two to three leading newspapers in each context, found no clear examples of solutions journalism in media coverage of socio-economic issues in the year prior to the outbreak of protests in each context.

The research did however reveal that mainstream outlets in the five countries covered social issues, although the quality of reporting differed significantly. For instance, in Algeria, Chile and Iraq, media outlets – including some regarded as arms of the political establishment – reported on the findings of third parties but carried out little to no analysis. In France and Lebanon, on the other hand, mainstream papers included examples of in-depth articles that examined social issues and sometimes recommended solutions.

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Media and Protest Movements

France, where the media landscape is the freest of the five countries, seemingly provided the most in-depth research on socio-economic issues in the year prior to the uprising. Several articles stood out in particular: an assessment of how much money a typical household has after paying its bills, an examination of how President Emmanuel Macron’s tax adjustments will benefit the ultra-rich at the expense of the poor, and research into high suicide rates among farmers.7

In Lebanon, An-Nahar and Al-Akhbar newspapers produced numerous detailed reports and op-eds in the year prior to the protests examining the country’s worrying fiscal situation. One particularly insightful piece drew comparisons between the current situation and 1992 when the country faced total collapse of the currency.8 And on 30 September 2019, two weeks before the outbreak of protests, An-Nahar published an op-ed lambasting the government’s mismanagement and calling on people to revolt.9

Chilean media covered socio-economic issues more tangentially. With few exceptions, mainstream Chilean newspapers reported findings from surveys and studies by third parties, without going into deep analysis of the topic itself. One exception to this was an article in La Tercera that came closest to solutions journalism. It compared socio-economic differences among the 36 country members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), revealing that while Chile and Finland performed similarly in terms of their brute Gini coefficient,10 Fins were far better off than their Chilean counterparts due to their government’s policies. The implication of the piece was that policy adjustments could ensure Chile is more economically equitable.


8 Al-Akhbar (29 September 2019). Available at: https://al-akhbar.com/Politics/276948/%D8%B4%D8%A8%D8%AD-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%80-199. (NB: the translation of the article’s title is ‘The Ghost of 1992’).

9 Sabah, M. ‘انتفض يا شعبى’, An-Nahar (30 September 2019) Available at: https://www.annahar.com/article/1039269-%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%81%D8%B6-%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%B4%D8%B9%D8%A8%D9%8A (NB: the translation of the article’s title is ‘Revolt! My People’).

10 A measure of socio-economic inequality on a 0 to 100 scale, where 0 represents complete equality.
## Security Incidents Affecting Journalists

Table 4: Incidents affecting journalists since the start of demonstrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major incidents</th>
<th>Journalists killed/ murdered</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Main culprit</th>
<th>Weapons commonly used in demonstrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Arrests, Harassment, Injuries</td>
<td>Security Forces</td>
<td>Rubber bullets, teargas and water cannons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Offices attacked, Harassment, Intimidation, Injuries</td>
<td>Security Forces and protesters</td>
<td>Live rounds, rubber bullets, teargas, bottles, rocks and other projectiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Harassment, Injuries</td>
<td>Protesters and Security Forces</td>
<td>Rubber bullets, teargas and water cannons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Outlets shut/suspended, Harassment, Intimidation, Abduction, Injuries</td>
<td>Security Forces and protesters</td>
<td>Live rounds, rubber bullets, teargas, Molotov cocktails, rocks and other projectiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Harassment, Intimidation, Injuries</td>
<td>Protesters, partisan groups and Security Forces</td>
<td>Teargas, water cannons and truncheons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The size and scale of demonstrations in the five countries took all pundits by surprise, including those interviewed for the purpose of this study. In most cases, demonstrations quickly turned violent – with security threats targeting journalists emanating both from security forces and protesters.

ALGERIA

Authorities in Algeria arrested at least five journalists since the outbreak of demonstrations in February 2019, including the editor of the opposition daily Le Provincial. Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a press freedom organisation, accused authorities of “constantly harass[ing] journalists and media outlets,” since protests erupted. Several reporters were apprehended and injured by the police.

CHILE

Security forces have fired rubber bullets, live rounds, anti-riot shotguns and teargas grenades at journalists, and arrested at least two reporters. Meanwhile, protesters set fire to the offices of El Mercurio, one of the country’s main broadsheets, and attacked four other media crews. Protest sympathisers using social media encouraged such violence against the media and launched online intimidation campaigns. The body of Albertina Martina Burgos, a freelance photographer and media worker, was found with stab wounds on 21 November 2019; it remains unclear whether her death is connected to her coverage of demonstrations.

IRAQ

The crackdown on the media has been systematic and violent. To date, three journalists have been murdered since demonstrations began in October. Photographer Ahmad Muhanna was shot in the back by an unknown gunman while covering protests in Baghdad on 6 December; photographer Hisham Fares Al-Aadhami was fatally shot in the chest by a militia member on 4 October; and Amjad Al-Dahamat, a writer and citizen journalist, was reportedly shot by unidentified gunmen near his home on 7 November. Journalists from over a dozen outlets have faced harassment and at least two have been injured. Unidentified individuals fired rocket propelled grenades at the Baghdad office of Al-Araby TV. Several journalists who covered the protests were beaten by security forces, and at least one suffered a serious head injury.

15 Idem.
FRANCE

Journalists faced direct threats from protesters and security services, as well as indirect threats due to clashes between protesters and security forces. 54 journalists were injured and 120 incidents between journalists and police were reported in the first year of the protests, according to Reporters Without Borders.

LEBANON

Journalists have been deliberately targeted by security forces, supporters of Lebanese parties and demonstrators. Violations against journalists have included: physical assault, prevention from filming, harassment, threats, and destruction of equipment. Supporters of Hezbollah and Amal, two of the political parties that comprise the government, beat protesters and several journalists with sticks and large rocks. One journalist was injured during a particularly heavy crackdown by security forces on 15 December.

Box 1:
Online Harassment Linked to Gender

During the course of the research, it became increasingly clear that women journalists in Lebanon have faced disproportionate harassment based on their gender, including sexually aggressive threats. According to Social Media Exchange (SMEX), a Lebanese organisation that works on issues of intersection between digital platforms and human rights, 70 percent of incidents of harassment and doxing (the practice of putting someone’s private information online) they are aware of in Lebanon targeted women.

Without reliable comparable data, it is impossible to say whether this is higher or lower than other countries in the study – or indeed other countries around the world. Certainly, online harassment of women journalists is pervasive and a global issue. According to some estimates, “1 in 2 female journalists around the world suffers or has suffered sexual harassment, psychological abuse, online trolling or other forms of human rights abuse.”

Security Preparedness within Local Media

Interviews with journalists and those familiar with journalists covering demonstrations reveal a concerning lack of security awareness and preparedness across many local news outlets. The majority of local journalists interviewed received no formal first aid, Hostile Environment Awareness Training (HEAT) or equivalent training, and believed that their experience mirrors that of their colleagues in other outlets. The research revealed variations across contexts and within the media industry. TV journalists tended to receive greater security preparation than their colleagues in the print media, while security standards were higher in French media than other contexts. Furthermore, more prominent journalists were more likely to have received training than their lesser known counterparts.

Nonetheless, even in France, security training within major outlets is anything but systematic. “We never received security training,” commented Aline Le Clerc, a reporter with Le Monde. “I never thought it was necessary until I witnessed police violence.” A reporter from a major broadcaster indicated a similar lack of training, saying that she felt utterly unprepared on one particular day of protests when “cobblestones were flying over our heads.” On the other extreme, reporters from BFM TV, an outlet that demonstrators have shown clear hostility towards, had security training as well as close protection personnel on reporting assignments, according to a reporter with the outlet.

Security equipment usage was sporadic and more common in France, Iraq and Chile. However, across contexts security preparation appears to be an iterative process, whereby journalists and outlets react to – rather than anticipate – evolving security threats.

The experience of a freelance photojournalist in Chile, is indicative. “I covered it without glasses or anything. But since I saw it was very violent, I had to look at the security procedures: anti-gas mask, protection for eyes and lemon juice to help those who don’t have protection.”

Shockingly, in the Chilean context where over 285 demonstrators have suffered severe eye injuries, journalists noted that many of their counterparts continue to operate without protective glasses. “When you see Chilean reporters covering the events on the ground, there is one word that comes to mind: negligence,” says Amaro Gómez-Pablo, a Spanish-Chilean journalist and former national news anchor. “None of the media outlets provide adequate training for some pretty hostile reporting where journalists are in the crossfire. On the one hand, they are trying to avoid the police firing, blinding many protesters with rubber bullets, and on the other hand, you’re dodging quite literally hundreds of stones being thrown at the special forces. The journalists are often in the middle of it all, without proper vests, helmets or protective eye gear.”

26 Personal interview. Journalist with BFM TV. 21 November 2019 (requested anonymity).
27 Personal interview. Freelance journalist and video producer. 25 November 2019 (requested anonymity).
28 Personal interview. Gómez-Pablo, Amaro, journalist with Canal 13. 16 December 2019.
A journalist working for a major Iraqi broadcaster, and who wished to remain anonymous, revealed how a lack of equipment and favouritism can also play a role. “Other reporters received bulletproof vests because they were close to the person in charge of distributing them. I did not,” he said. In the three contexts, journalists interviewed have noted that often they or their colleagues get around the security risks by filming from a distance or a vantage point (usually from a building) or relying on footage from wire services or from the protesters themselves.

In Algeria, where demonstrations have been less violent, the use of security equipment was rare, and some interviewees treated risks with only mild concern. “I cover a demonstration like I cover a simple press conference, I feel when things begin to degenerate (and I get out of danger),” remarked one Algerian reporter.²⁹ Similarly, Ahmad Gasmia, Editor-in-Chief at Algeria’s Maghreb Emergent, said that because incidents of violence were non-existent or rare in Algeria, training was not necessary, adding that the paper had clear security guidelines instead.³⁰

In Lebanon, a similar attitude was observed until the weekend of 15-16 December, when security forces used large quantities of teargas, as well as rubber bullets and water cannons. These methods, which Human Rights Watch decried as an “excessive use of force,”³¹ caused many journalists to wear protective gear.

There were some encouraging signs from local news outlets in some contexts, but it seemed to be more through individual efforts than through systematised procedures enforced by the outlet. Some journalists took a creative approach: reporters of the National Broadcasting Network (NBN), a Lebanese TV station that is unpopular among demonstrators because of its affiliation with Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, removed NBN branded covers from their microphones so protesters would not know who they worked for. Others took more conventional approaches by operating in teams and pre-determining escape routes in the event of demonstrations turning violent.

The vast majority of interviewees said that training was needed and that they would recommend greater security awareness within their outlet.

Security Recommendations

There are no one-size-fits-all guidelines for security preparedness. Every situation is distinct, context-specific and carries different risks. What follows, therefore, is not a list of ‘do’s and don’ts’ but rather a list of recommended practices that news outlets and journalists should adopt when covering demonstrations. The principal aim is to encourage news outlets and journalists to think critically about risk and mitigation measures before, during and after assignments. The recommendations are informed by conversations with security professionals who work with news crews as well as journalists who have reported from demonstrations.

³⁰ Personal interview. Gasmia, Ahmad, journalist with Maghreb Emergent. 19 November 2019.
³¹ Lebanon: Excessive Force Against Protesters, HRW (20 December 2019)
GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Ensure duty of care commitments and demands are understood by both parties

Duty of care is not confined to journalists’ responsibilities to their readers and their sources (of which much has been written). It extends to the responsibilities organisations have to their staff and can be defined as moral or legal obligation to make sure all reasonable measures are taken to ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff and people they deal with. Such measures may include: carrying out internal risk assessments for stories, allowing journalists to have the final say over whether to report on particular stories, and not punishing them for refusing to cover stories based on reasonable security grounds. For their part, employees have a duty to their employer to behave appropriately, in a security conscious manner and follow manager decisions to stop reporting on a particular story due to reasonable security grounds. Organisations should produce written duty of care guidelines that should be signed by both parties.

2. Provide equipment and training relevant to the types of risk

News outlets are best placed to understand the types of risks their staff face given the context in which they operate. They also have a moral responsibility to provide staff with training and equipment appropriate to these risks. Tightening financial budgets certainly impose limitations on the range of options available to outlets, particularly local outlets, but this factor does not excuse inaction. Examples of cost-effective and creative ways of training journalists include: collaborating with other news outlets to secure training at discount rates and securing free or subsidised training through press freedom organisations. The latter opportunity is typically reserved for freelancers and staff journalists in some developing countries.

There are also a number of practices that should not come at the expense of securing training from accredited trainers, but are recommended in cases where training is not available or for refresher purposes. For instance, there are numerous free or reasonably priced online courses, including tutorials, virtual reality and augmented reality courses.

Box 2: Resources for Local Journalists

Free/Low Cost Online Training Resources

- The Committee to Protect Journalists has an extensive list of resources for journalists from multiple press freedom organisations, including: Risk Assessments, Equipment Assessments and First Aid videos.
  
  See [cpj.org/emergency-response/pre-assignment-preparations.php](http://cpj.org/emergency-response/pre-assignment-preparations.php);
  [cpj.org/reports/2012/04/journalist-security-guide.php](http://cpj.org/reports/2012/04/journalist-security-guide.php);

- Other useful links include:
  
  video.skeyesmedia.org
  rsf.org/en/guidelines-and-advice
  www.alsoknownas.co/
  www.1stoptionsafety.com/course-catalogue/courses
  library.witness.org/product/filming-in-teams-protests-demonstrations-rallies

Notable organisations that support security training for journalists (not exhaustive)

- International Federation of Journalists
- UNESCO
- Rory Peck Trust
- Global Journalist Security
- Samir Kassir Foundation’s SKeys Center for Media and Cultural Freedom (SKeys)
- International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF)
- A Culture of Safety (ACOS) Alliance
- Frontline Freelance Register
- Marie Colvin Journalists Network
- Gulf Centre for Human Rights
- International News Safety Institute

Furthermore, media outlets should create a culture of knowledge sharing within and across organisations whereby trained and experienced journalists formally share their knowledge with colleagues. Establishing a positive company culture where knowledge sharing is encouraged and stories of unnecessary risks are reprimanded is also strongly recommended. At a minimum, journalists covering demonstrations should have first aid training, and specifically know the types of injuries that people have or are likely to face and know how to treat them. They should know what weapons could potentially be used and how to protect themselves. They should also be provided with training on how to use any equipment they will be carrying on assignment as well as its limitations.
3. Pre-Deployment Risk Assessment

This phase is crucial. Effective risk assessment considers any foreseeable risk and establishes recommended contingency measures. Some questions are common sense, but others – particularly granular levels of detail – require considered thought. It is important that the journalists reporting internalise this assessment and know how to react quickly to foreseeable risks. Every assessment is specific, however, Box 3 illustrates just some of the considerations journalists should take.

Box 3: Potential Pre-assignment Considerations

CONTEXT:
• What security incidents have occurred to date and what could occur in the future?
• Are there particular risks associated with the profiles of our journalists (consider gender, ethnicity, appearance, team size, reputation, etc.)?
• Where are threats likely to emanate from, by whom and when?
• Should your team stand out or blend in – how does this affect what they wear and how they conduct themselves?
• Do you know people who are influential and can mitigate risks of mistaken identity (this is particularly useful in cases where demonstrators are concerned about infiltration)?
• Do you know the location of the demonstration well?
• Do you have an exit strategy if the demonstration turns violent?
• Who are you likely/scheduled to meet and have you done due diligence/background checks on them?
• What is the weather forecast?

EQUIPMENT:
• What equipment do you have – is this necessary or will it draw unwanted attention?
• Could our equipment be mistaken for a weapon?
• Is the equipment insured?
• Has the equipment been tested before deployment to ensure it works and has sufficient power?
• Do you have back up equipment, including portable battery charges?
• What first aid equipment might you need?
• Do you have contingency money stored in a safe place?
KEY CONTACTS:

• If you or your colleagues are injured, what information should you be aware of (consider: first aid procedures, contact number and location of medical facilities, personal medical information such as blood type and any ailments, medical insurance details, people to contact, how to move to a safe location, etc.)?
• Should you keep a card with some of this information on your person in case you are knocked unconscious and are separated from colleagues?

LOGISTICS:

• How will you be moving to each location?
• If you are using a car, have you made sure it is fit for purpose (check: petrol, oil, windscreen wipers, damage, electrics, seatbelts and tyres)?
• Do you know the person driving and are you confident in their abilities?
• Do you know the routes?
• Have you checked the latest traffic reports?

COMMUNICATION:

• What is your communication plan if there is a signal interruption? Do you have an alternative means of communication?
• Do you have a back-up phone battery?
• Have you designated a check-in time and location if you are separated from colleagues and cannot communicate?
• Is someone in head office monitoring social media and news feeds and providing security updates to the team in the field?

4. Provide equipment relevant to the types of risk

Security equipment commonly recommended by journalists covering potentially dangerous protests include: gas masks, protective eyewear, eye cleanser, helmets, security vests and flak jackets.33

When determining the right equipment to be brought to a demonstration, consider the practicality of the equipment, how it would affect how you will be perceived, and the types of dangers you are likely to encounter. For instance, given the high rate (>285 instances) of eye injuries among protesters in Chile, protective eyewear should be an essential item for all journalists operating in that context. It is also essential to know how to use the equipment and its limitations. Helmets, for instance, are not fully bulletproof; they can, however, stop some bullets and will significantly reduce the damage caused by a gas canister or rock to the head.34

33 For a more comprehensive list of equipment to be brought to a demonstration, including non-safety equipment, see: Todras-Whitehill, T. Your Essential Guide to Packing for a Protest (Updated 2019). Available at: https://taratw.com/in-preparation-for-a-protest-how-to-pack-2014-2019/.
34 The effectiveness of helmets is contingent on a number of factors, including type and quality of helmets, weapons used, angle and distance of fire, etc. See, for instance, Bullet Proof Helmets: What You Need To Know, Hard Head Veterans (15 May 2018). Available at: https://www.hardheadveterans.com/blogs/reviews/bulletproof-helmets-what-you-need-to-know.
The information gap between the item’s perceived effectiveness and the reality could have far reaching impacts. Philip Drinkwater, Senior Operations Manager at Pilgrims Group, a leading security risk management consultancy, warned: “Security equipment is important, but it can also give people false confidence and cause them to take risks they wouldn’t otherwise take.”\footnote{35} Box 4 provides a list of useful questions one should ask when deciding what equipment should be brought to protests.

**Box 4:**
**Considerations Regarding Equipment**

- Have I assessed the types of risks I might face?
- Do I know what type (and brand) of equipment will mitigate or reduce my exposure to harm?
- Am I familiar with the equipment? Do I understand its functionality and limitations?
- Have I considered how the equipment may impact how I am perceived among protesters, security forces and other actors? If it is likely to increase my exposure to risk, are there mitigation procedures I can take (e.g. hide the equipment under clothing or in bags, move to a less risky location)?
- Is the equipment commensurate with the risk?

**5. Deployment Situational Awareness**

Situational awareness refers to being cognisant of what is happening near and around your physical location, particularly the unusual. As Philip Drinkwater puts it, situational awareness comprises attention to the “absence of the normal and the presence of the abnormal.”\footnote{36} If, for instance, a popular protest location is usually full of journalists and then is not, find out swiftly why this is the case and act accordingly. There may, for instance, be a counter-demonstration nearby which often sharply increases the risk of violent confrontation. Journalists on assignment should at all times employ situational awareness, noting patterns and inconsistencies. They should ensure their senses are not unnecessarily hampered; for instance, avoid wearing headphones when possible and make sure your visibility is not blocked. It is also good practice to regularly take a break from reporting, to take stock of the situation and to look around for anything awry. A security manager with an international news outlet who requested anonymity recommends setting a timer for every 15 minutes, depending on the nature of the demonstration. Journalists should also be aware that they might become desensitised to increasing levels of violence over long periods of reporting and should check-in with themselves and their colleagues regularly, so risks are rationalised rather than normalised. Situational Awareness includes the old maxim of listening to your instincts and not exceeding your levels of comfort.

**6. Lessons learnt de-brief**

After a particular reporting trip, it is always advisable to note and share security lessons learnt. The process is iterative and your advice could ensure the security of your colleagues. Ideally, news outlets should keep a set of guidelines that are constantly updated and contain specific recommendations for journalists operating in different contexts.

\footnote{35} Personal interview. Drinkwater, Philip, Pilgrims Group. 10 December 2019.
\footnote{36} Idem.
Media Censorship and Bias

State Censorship

Censorship was most apparent in Algeria and Iraq, two countries whose press freedom index is rated as Not Free in the latest Freedom House rankings.\(^37\)

In Algeria, state censorship came into sharp focus with the outbreak of protests. On 22 February 2019, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in the biggest mass mobilisation in 18 years. Yet, state- and privately-owned broadcasters remained mute, resuming regular broadcasting and largely ignoring one of the biggest stories in years. Media censorship prompted outrage and resignations among journalists.\(^38\) On 28 February, 100 journalists held a demonstration against reporting restrictions; a dozen were briefly detained.\(^39\) In the first week of protests, the state-owned Canal Algérie included just four minutes 35 seconds of protest coverage in its midday and evening broadcasts.\(^40\) Censorship dramatically manifested on air on 3 March as a visibly startled Nadia Madassi, the long-time anchor of Canal Algérie, received sharp instructions through her earpiece to stop reading a bulletin about an opposition candidate.\(^41\) The following day she resigned. Internet access has also been restricted, most likely in order to disrupt the sharing of information about the protest movement.\(^42\)

Iraq’s security apparatus has systematically cracked down on dissenting voices in the media. In the first week of the protests, masked men stormed the offices of four broadcasters, ransacking their offices and sending a clear message that coverage of the protests would not be tolerated. This took place two days after the start of a temporary internet shutdown on 2 October 2019.\(^43\) By late November, authorities had shut down nine channels, four radio stations and had issued warnings to several other outlets.\(^44\)

In the other three countries, censorship was less stark but did manifest to some degree in Lebanon, with broadcasters Télé Liban, which is state-owned, and OTV, affiliated to the President of the Republic’s political party, failing to cover early protests. While NBN has covered the protests since the start, the broadcaster has muted the sound when crowds chanted slogans deemed offensive to their political


\(^{41}\) Idem.


\(^{43}\) Iraq shuts down internet again as protests intensify, Netblocks (4 November 2019). Available at: https://netblocks.org/reports/iraq-shuts-down-internet-again-as-protests-intensify-G6oOWz8n.

backer, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, who has been in his position since 1992. Dima Sadek, a prominent journalist at the non-partisan broadcaster LBCI, resigned from her role alleging that she had been sanctioned for her tweets relating to leaks from the Baabda Presidential Palace (regarding the President and his allies) and that she had unfairly been removed from political programmes. She also said that her tweets were “under surveillance.”

Political Bias

As the protest movement grew, censorship was less apparent in Lebanon’s highly politicised media space, but biases were stark. OTV, NBN and Al-Manar, which closely represent the political positions of, respectively, the Free Patriotic Movement, Amal Movement and Hezbollah, largely downplayed the protests in their early days. Al-Akhbar, a leftist paper that usually adopts a pro-Hezbollah stance, echoed allegations made by Hezbollah’s leader Hassan Nasrallah that the protests were suspicious and funded by foreign embassies. Four journalists from that paper resigned in protest at the paper’s coverage of the protests. One reporter, Joy Slim, expressed on Twitter her disappointment at the way the paper “rushed to join the ranks of the counter-revolution by endorsing the theories of provocative plots that fuelled street violence and attacks on citizens.” Two journalists also resigned from the pan-Arab broadcaster Al-Mayadeen, which some commentators have alleged was in protest at the network’s reporting.

On the other hand, Al Jadeed, MTV and LBCI are connected to business and political interests largely outside the government. These outlets amplified the voices of the crowds, with journalists embedded in demonstrations passing the microphone to one protester after another. Critics claim such coverage is tantamount to incitement and that these outlets often blurred the lines between journalism and activism; the case of an Al Jadeed reporter intervening on air to prevent a man from being arrested is one controversial example.

While mainstream media in both France and Chile covered the demonstrations from the outset, they too suffered accusations of bias for allegedly focusing too heavily on the clashes and looting, and too little on the root causes of protesters’ grievances and on violence by security forces. Chile’s main TV channels Mega, CHV, Channel 13 and TVN faced the brunt of the accusations, but protesters also directed their ire at El Mercurio newspaper, which experienced an arson attack by protesters on 20 October.

49 ‘Spinning, downplaying, ignoring: Lebanon protests and the media’, The Listening Post, YouTube video. Added by Al Jazeera English (30 October 2019). Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTBzL-ry89w.
“Local reporters are seen as part of the establishment. We’re often seen as biased professionals, hijacked by commercial interests or a given political agenda. Though that may not be the case,” says Amaro Gomez-Pablo.51

Similarly, many of the Yellow Vests protesters in France felt anger towards the media. “Many of the news organisations that I once trusted treated us with contempt,” said one French protester to France 24.52 “They took a long time to understand us, and by snubbing us they widened the gulf between the elites and the people,” he added. Many journalists agreed that there were failings in the media’s early coverage of the Yellow Vests movement. France 3 was accused of photoshopping a demonstrator’s sign from the original “Macron Leave” to “Macron” and of cutting short a segment that criticised police violence; the channel and the reporter denied the charge.53 BFM TV was particularly singled out for overrepresenting violence by protesters.54 A journalist who asked to remain anonymous, revealed that while on air at a major broadcaster he/she indicated that the situation on the ground was calm, but was told by editors “you can’t say that everything is ok. Say that there are tensions.” Real and perceived biases within the media are linked to protesters’ harassment of journalists. There have been several instances of physical violence by protesters against journalists.55 Far more common are threats, abuse and intimidation, both online and in person. On 11 January 2019, small groups of protesters spent a night blocking the distribution centre for La Voix du Nord newspaper and the printing centre for L’Yonne Républicaine in Auxerre, effectively blocking several regional publications from being distributed the following day.56

Across contexts and to varying degrees, mainstream media lost credibility among protesters and their sympathisers for their portrayal of the protests, particularly in the early phases of the demonstrations. Anecdotal research suggests that while traditional media continue to play an important role, the loss of confidence in some outlets’ reporting drove audiences towards alternative sources, namely digital media and social media.

51 Personal interview. Gómez-Pablo, Amaro, journalist with Canal 13. 16 December 2019.
56 Idem.
Internet and the Battle for the Narrative

Digital Media: An Avenue for Free Expression

The credibility deficit among some mainstream media, combined with an ever-increasing demand for accurate information has been a boon for digital media. Typically low budget, some of these outlets have accurately captured the mood on the ground, enabling new avenues for expression in what are often highly restricted media landscapes.

This is particularly apparent in Lebanon, where independent, non-sectarian outlets like Megaphone have been described as the “voice of the uprising.”\(^{57}\) The platform features videos from the protests but also articles that explicitly call for the toppling of the political establishment. For security reasons, journalists at Megaphone maintain a low profile, even keeping the location of their offices a guarded secret. Diana Moukalled, co-founder of Daraj, another digital media outlet in Lebanon, says that these platforms and some social media pages provide a platform for objective reporting that is not shaped by the political agendas of traditional news outlets.\(^{58}\)

In Chile, digital media has become more popular due to the protests, according to Ivan Torres, a Chilean photojournalist.\(^{59}\) The Clinic, a satirical outlet founded in 1998, and Ciper, an independent alternative news source established a decade later, have long been alternatives to traditional outlets. More recently, the digital platform El Mostrador has also become a key source for reporting and commentary on the protests. These outlets have a leftist/liberal bent and have effectively reflected popular sentiment on the ground.

In Iraq, Albasheer Show has tapped into the pulse of the protest movement and is threatening the political establishment. Launched in 2014 and hosted by Ahmed Albasheer, the satirical show pokes fun at the issues of the day and the country’s most powerful. Since the protests broke out, the show has taken on new relevance, discussing key issues faced by the protesters, highlighting corruption and showing videos from protesters that are ignored by mainstream media. The government has tried to shut down broadcasts of the show by jamming the signal for its broadcaster, Deutsch Welle Arabic, but the show has a following of over 3 million on YouTube.\(^{60}\)


\(^{58}\) Personal interview. Moukalled, Diana, journalist with Daraj. 10 December 2019.

\(^{59}\) Personal interview. Torres, Ivan, photojournalist with Al Jazeera. 25 November 2019.

\(^{60}\) Rosenberg, T. ‘You Are Killing Us? We Will Make You a Joke.’ Meet Ahmed Albasheer, The New York Times (26 December 2019). Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/26/opinion/albasheer-show-iraq-political-revolution.html. Further detail was provided through a personal interview with an Iraqi activist, who was contacted on 8 December 2019 and requested anonymity.
Mobilisation through Social Media

Social media has played a central role in starting, sustaining and calling out violations within and more commonly against protest movements. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the primary messaging boards, though news is often disseminated on WhatsApp, Telegram and other messaging applications.

Nearly 50 percent of Algeria’s population have a Facebook account and are typically active users. The platform was key to galvanising popular sentiment and organising popular protests. In France, viral videos, such as activist Jacline Mouraud’s diatribe against government policies shortly before the outbreak of protests, were viewed by millions of people. A video posted by Ghislain Coutard resulted in demonstrators adopting the characteristic yellow vest uniform. In Chile, information about early protests and tips on evading subway charges were primarily disseminated on Twitter. In Iraq, authorities demonstrated their fear of the mobilising power of social media by blocking Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram the day after protests broke out. In Lebanon, which has a population of around six million people, data from 2017 reveals 3.4 million Facebook users and 1.3 million Instagram users. The importance of WhatsApp to demonstrators in Lebanon is underscored by the fact that a tax on the messaging app was the spark that ignited the country’s protests.

Countless Facebook pages have been set up by protesters where updates and videos of the movement are shared. Pages like Akhbar al-Saha (News of the Square) act as de facto news outlets, according to Diana Moukalled of Lebanon’s Daraj platform, who said: “They have a group of people participating in events and uploading their videos onto that page.” A photojournalist in Chile compared Twitter hashtags as fulfilling the same function as news platforms, where discussion around the protests is streamlined. Twitter has played an important role in disseminating news globally. Protesters tweeting about developments not only use hashtags in their native tongue, but also in English to reach international audiences. #IraqProtests, #ChileProtests, #LebanonProtests and the anglicised #Hirak are popular examples.

Functions like video live streaming have enabled anyone with a smartphone to post live broadcasts as they occur. This can be an effective mechanism to counter misinformation; unlike other media, the veracity, location and timing of livestreaming is harder to dispute. As Freedom House puts it: “Anyone..."
watching a live stream can type questions or comments that are automatically superimposed within the video for all to see, including the streamers themselves, who often respond to comments in real time. Yet, social media can do precisely the opposite, often fanning the flames of misinformation. And because of the power of social media, once misinformation reaches critical mass it is very difficult to counter it.

In October 2019, an Al Jazeera crew in Santiago, Chile, was filming a segment and panned across to demonstrators who were jumping on a vehicle. At that time, a bystander filmed the same incident and says in his recording that a TV producer told the men to jump on the vehicle. “The accusation was completely made up,” says Ivan Torres, who filmed the segment for Al Jazeera. “But it caused us major security issues and made it far more difficult to cover the demonstrations.” Al Jazeera’s presenter, Teresa Bo, faced intense online abuse (including death threats) and left the country on security grounds.

Social media has effectively replaced mainstream media for those who feel media coverage of protests is censored or biased. In some contexts, particularly Chile and France, protest sympathisers actively encouraged people to use social media instead of conventional news sources. This was dramatically expressed live on air in Chile, when a protester elbowed a presenter out of the way and shouted on live TV: “Turn off your televisions, the media lie! Get your information from social media!”

But it is important not to overestimate the role of social media. In Iraq, as one interviewee stated, Facebook has 17 million accounts and Iraq’s population is 40 million which means that more than half rely on legacy news channels. “Old people for example don’t have social media, they watch traditional news media.” In Lebanon too, several interviewees stated that TV channels remains a key source of information for people.

While disinformation – more commonly referred to as ‘fake news’ – existed, it was far more common to observe instances of misinformation and misunderstandings, which were rapidly disseminated as fact through social media.

One story in France is illustrative. A video uploaded online shows police officers facing a group of protesters in a town in southwest of France. The video shows the police removing their helmets. This was seized by Yellow Vests supporters as a sign that the police were siding with the Yellow Vests against President Emmanuel Macron and the French government. People shared the video with comments like “The government is in trouble.” However, fact checkers at AFP revealed that while the video was not doctored, the story was not as it appeared. It was actually a negotiation tactic by the police, who did...
not want to appear hostile to the protesters. As a presenter on Euronews’ The Cube stated, “Social media is central and crucial... but context is king. What you see is not necessarily fake but they may not give you the entire picture.”

Social media has also sharpened the ‘echo chamber’ phenomenon, whereby information and opinions that confirm individuals’ perspectives are shared and thereby reinforced. What results is a myopic impression of events that hardens rebuttals of anything that does not align with that view. It could be argued that this results in the polarisation of positions and the non-acceptance of moderate views.

Bots and Disinformation Campaigns

A phenomenon apparent in Algeria, Lebanon and Iraq was the “weaponisation of social media,” whereby bots and automatic software are impacting the narratives around the respective protests. In Algeria, anti-Hirak Facebook profiles and pages that are believed to be manipulated by bots regularly diffuse state propaganda. Similarly, pro-Hirak pages have received spates of negative comments from potentially fake accounts. Typically, these have been recently created and have few friends. So widespread is this phenomenon that these pages and profiles are referred to as ‘electronic flies.’

In Iraq, a comparable campaign is taking place on Twitter, though it supports rather than opposes the protest movement. In an interview with The Guardian, Marc Owen-Jones, a researcher at Hamad bin Khalifa University who studies such phenomena, said: “There is almost certainly an influence campaign on Twitter to generate support for an Iraqi revolution. Almost 20% of all accounts tweeting one specific hashtag are likely fake.”

Meanwhile, in Lebanon, a similar development appears to be taking place. Owen-Jones analysed around 6,500 suspicious tweets from around 4,494 Twitter accounts and concluded on 21 October 2019 that a social media campaign largely originating in Saudi Arabia had been demonising Hassan Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah. “As has become the custom on Twitter, different forces are trying to inflame tensions in other countries, polluting organic discussions with inorganic content,” Owen-Jones wrote on Twitter.

77 Idem.
78 The quote is attributed to Marc Owen-Jones, a researcher at Hamad bin Khalifa University in Michaelson, R. and Safi, M. #Disinformation: the online threat to protest in the Middle East, The Guardian (15 December 2019). Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/15/disinformation-the-online-threat-to-protest-in-the-middle-east.
81 Owen Jones, M. ‘So yes, as has become the custom on Twitter...’, @marcowenjones (21 October 2019). https://twitter.com/marcowenjones/status/1186387216647491586.
created the same day, a strong indication that they were fake accounts.\textsuperscript{82} This research points to an orchestrated strategy by political forces to influence online discourse and public perceptions through social media.

**Countering Bots and Misinformation**

There were efforts in mainstream media as well as on social media to expose and debunk fake news across contexts. Chile’s La Tercera newspaper regularly features a fact-checking series where it debunks or verifies viral news.\textsuperscript{83} However, the same paper faced accusations of bias from within the organisation, after journalists accused their editors of censoring reports from the protests and it emerged that the paper had falsely claimed that immigrants were responsible for arson attacks at metro stations that occurred at the start of the protests, a story that fanned ethnic tensions and prompted La Tercera to issue an apology.\textsuperscript{84}

Less systematic efforts at debunking fake news were evident in France. In January 2018, for instance, Le Monde analysed the claims made in an alarmist image which accused the government of a series of price increases and found them to be mainly false.\textsuperscript{85} In Algeria, activists set up a Facebook page, Fake News DZ, to debunk fake news about the country.\textsuperscript{86} In Lebanon, Jad Shahrour, Communication Officer for the Samir Kassir Foundation, appeared on the digital media platform Daraj and appealed to the public to critically evaluate the veracity of information they receive before disseminating it to their networks.\textsuperscript{87}

Oftentimes, claims made by leading political figures are ridiculed and debunked by users on social media. In Iraq, for instance, General Abdul Kareem Khalaf, the official spokesman for Iraq’s Armed Forces Commander-in-Chief was widely made fun of for denying that security forces had used live fire and tear gas, despite countless videos disproving these claims. Iraqis responded with a hashtag #Tweet_Like_Khalaf.\textsuperscript{88} Similarly, in Lebanon after Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah implied that the protests were funded by foreign embassies, social media users ridiculed the claim and joked that they had personally paid the protesters.

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\bibitem{83} Fact checking en medio de la emergencia: la verdad sobre lo que se dice y viraliza’, La Tercera (21 October 2019). Available at: https://www.latercera.com/la-tercera-pm/noticia/fact-checking-medio-la-emergencia-la-verdad-lo-se-dice-viraliza/871267.
\bibitem{84} Van Der Spek, B. ‘The Struggle of Chilean Media Covering the National Crisis’, Chile Today (12 November 2019). Available at: https://chile-today.cl/site/the-struggle-of-chilean-media-covering-the-national-crisis.
\bibitem{85} Le Monde found that only six of the 19 claims had any basis in fact. The image had been shared over 50,000 times at the time the piece was published. Source: Senecat. A. ‘Les mensonges d’un message viral sur la hausse des prix en 2018’, Le Monde (4 January 2018). Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2018/01/04/les-mensonges-d-un-message-viral-sur-la-hauserdes-prix-en-2018_5257468_4355770.html.
\bibitem{86} Silva, M. ‘Algeria protests: how disinformation spread on social media’, BBC Trending (17 September 2019).
\bibitem{88} Berger, M. and Salim, M. ‘Iraq’s military is spreading fake news about the protests — and Iraqis are laughing back’, Washington Post (18 November 2019). Available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?destination=%2fworld%2f2019%2f11%2f18%2firaqs-military-is-spreading-fake-news-about-protests-iraqs-are-laughing-back%2f%3f.
Conclusion

To varying degrees, news outlets in Algeria, Chile, France, Iraq and Lebanon covered socio-economic issues in the year prior to the outbreak of protests. However, research suggests that the topics could have been covered in far greater depth. Also, there is clearly no culture of solutions journalism in any of the five countries. Further research is needed to determine whether news outlets are open to receiving training on this method of journalism.

With few exceptions, security preparations taken by news outlets covering protests were found to be grossly inadequate. There are three primary reasons for this: lack of awareness, lack of interest, and lack of funds. Overcoming the first two issues requires management or a critical mass of staff to drive change within the organisation, where security preparations are prioritised both formally (through guidelines recommended in Section 2) and informally (through greater security information sharing among journalists). Budgetary issues are a major concern for most local media outlets, though this does not excuse journalists being ill-prepared to cover dangerous stories. Beyond the ethical requirement to train journalists in security issues prior to dangerous assignments, there are numerous options available to even the most cash-strapped organisations. Securing funding or support through press freedom organisations is an obvious first step, though organisations can also be more creative in terms of sharing training costs across numerous media organisations as well as carrying out in-house training and knowledge sharing so journalists can learn from the experience of others. This is in addition to the online resources available to media professionals.

There is little doubt internet and social media have changed the rules of the information game, for better and for worse. No longer can narratives pushed by state and partisan media go uncontested or mass protests be ignored. Equipped with smartphones, demonstrators can literally livestream events as they occur. This can, to some extent, put a check on repression and push media to be more transparent and accountable. On the other hand, this media ‘revolution’ has also sped up the proliferation of lies and disinformation, while creating echo chambers of subjective news streams. For journalists, this has not only ratcheted up competition, but has facilitated online intimidation, abuse and threats. Minimising these threats to journalists should continue to be a key focus in newsrooms and across media support organisations.

The growing realisation by and/or greater pressure on social media platforms to more actively counter fake news and information warfare is a positive development. Tech giants Facebook, Google, Twitter and Microsoft have signed on to the EU’s voluntary code of practice on disinformation99 and in-house teams have been employed to spot and remove fake content. As the research has indicated, there are efforts among citizens and journalists to counter dis- and misinformation and this should be encouraged and supported, not least through financial aid. Nevertheless, they remain largely inadequate to the volume of disinformation permeating social media. It may not be possible to fully stem fake information, but through increased awareness campaigns that equip users with a more critical eye to spot fake information and encourage them to report fake news, the problem can be managed.

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## Annex: Media Outlets Researched for this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
<th>Paper</th>
<th>Digital</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Description (Media Type, Political Affiliation, Ownership, Language)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>El Watan</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td>Ennahar TV</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>TV channel. Privately owned/close to government. Politically conservative. Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Echorouk Al Yaomi</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daily newspaper. Politically conservative. Arabic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>El Mercurio</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper. Right-wing. Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Tercera</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper. Moderate conservative. Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Clinic</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly Newspaper/magazine. Satirical. Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>Libération</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper. Centre-left. French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Figaro</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper. Right-wing. French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Le Monde</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>Newspaper. Centre-left. French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>TF1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>TV Channel. Privately owned. French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BFM TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>TV Channel. Privately owned. French.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FRANCE 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>TV Channel. Publicly owned. French.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Annex: Media Outlets Researched for this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Media Outlet</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Bias/Alignment</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iraq</strong></td>
<td><strong>Al-Mada</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper. Privately owned. Left leaning. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Sabah</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper. Publicly owned. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Zaman</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper. Privately owned. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Sharqiyah</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>TV Channel. Privately owned. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Iraqiya</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>TV Channel. State-run. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lebanon</strong></td>
<td><strong>Al-Akhbar</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper. Leftist/pro-Hezbollah. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>An-Nahar</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>Newspaper. Pro-March 14 political bloc. Arabic.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>LBCI</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TV Channel. Privately owned. Arabic.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>OTV</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>TV Channel. Pro-Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). Arabic.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Manar</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>TV Channel. Owned by Hezbollah. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Al-Daraj</strong></td>
<td>x</td>
<td><strong>New Media. Independent. Arabic.</strong></td>
<td>Arabic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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